

Fw: Suggestion to expedite open source voting implementation in San Francisco.

Commission, Elections (REG)

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To: Commission, Elections (REG) <elections.commission@sfgov.org>;

From: Richard Dawson

Sent: Thursday, August 6, 2015 12:53 PM

To: Commission, Elections (REG)

Cc: Jerdonek, Chris (REG); Hewitt, Nadya (REG); Yu, Winnie (REG); Paris, Dominic (REG); Rowe, Jill (REG)

Subject: Suggestion to expedite open source voting implementation in San Francisco.

[address redacted]

August 6, 2015

San Francisco Election Commission:

I urge you to take the steps necessary to accelerate San Francisco's adoption of open source voting software. Each delay in achieving that goal not only risks a loss, at minimum, of voter confidence in the electoral process, but also prolongs the costs associated with the current system. Accordingly, I recommend that San Francisco replace the existing Director of Elections with Alan Dechert, a prominent leader of the open source voting movement.

San Francisco's efforts to implement open source voting appear to be experiencing a pattern of delay like that which frustrated state-led efforts to implement open source. The San Francisco Election Commission's 2007 statement on open source states its intention to "...use voting systems technology, including hardware and software, that at a minimum, is publicly disclosed," where "...public disclosure means that members of the public should have at least the right to inspect, test, and comment on such technology in a procurement process and as configured for a specific election independent of the San Francisco Department of Elections or other government agency of the City and County of San Francisco." Despite this commitment, and despite the availability of resources to accomplish the task, the Election Commission has been unable to make substantial progress towards its goal.

It appears that this frustration is largely the result of a difference

between of the priorities of the Director of Elections and the priorities shared by the Board of Supervisors and the Elections Commission.

During my over thirty years as an engineer and project manager, I have learned that meeting the challenges of complex system implementation requires knowledgeable, committed, talented, and, perhaps most important, enthusiastic leadership. If the leader of a project is not fully committed, or has conflicting interests, that project is almost certain to falter, missing deadlines and objectives.

I suspect that the present Director of Elections, who has done a satisfactory job of working with the existing systems, understandably feels little motivation to implement a new system. Consequently, eight years after expressing its intention to move to open source voting software, the Elections Commission is still waiting for progress.

It is time to put someone in charge who shares the Board of Supervisors' and the Election Commission's goal of implementing open source voting.

I live in Los Angeles, but what happens in San Francisco will ultimately affect me and other voters throughout California. The open source system that you develop in San Francisco could very well be the first such system put in place. If so, and if you do a good job of implementation, it will prove once-and-for-all that open source election software can improve security, inspire greater public confidence, and provide substantial cost savings relative to proprietary solutions. I want to see San Francisco succeed.

Open source software for elections is not a new idea. It first came to my attention around 2000. At that point proprietary election systems had produced numerous highly questionable results, while open source software packages such as Linux, Open Office, and Apache (a web server) were demonstrating the remarkable capability of the open source process to produce superior, secure software. I approached my then State Representative, Jackie Goldberg, and she introduced Assembly Concurrent Resolution 242, passed in 2004, calling on the Secretary of State to study the feasibility of open source voting software and to report on the findings by January 1, 2006.

Then Secretary of State Bruce McPherson's failure to provide the report led then Senator Debra Bowen to hold hearings on the matter. She subsequently ran for the office of Secretary of State, primarily campaigning on the need for open source election software. That position clearly resonated with the public, for she won handily. McPherson's delay in reporting, however, had already stymied progress on open source development, helping to keep proprietary software in place, despite its known issues.

Please don't allow San Francisco's opportunity to lead in open source voting implementation be thwarted by bureaucratic inaction.

I believe that Alan Dechert has the skills and personal connections needed to lead a successful open source implementation effort. Mr. Dechert, whom I have known since he came forward to help pass the ACR 242, has long been involved in the development of open source voting software. He organized a group of volunteer software developers who then produced and demonstrated a novel, open source voting system based upon a voter verified, human and machine readable, paper ballot. The software improved over the years, with successive demonstrations including a four-day exhibit at Linuxworld at the Moscone Center, which was widely reported in the media, including the San Francisco Chronicle.

Mr Dechert is confident that, given the opportunity, he can, with the help of the open source community, have an open source system running on off-the-shelf-hardware and ready for certification by the end of the year.

Mr. Dechert is certainly knowledgeable, committed, and enthusiastic, having devoted nearly fifteen years to open source voting software. I am confident that with his leadership San Francisco could set the pace for the nation with regard to state-of-the-art voting systems while providing secure and easy voting for all who are fortunate enough to live in San Francisco..

Sincerely,

Richard Dawson